

Following Christ and our Comfort Zones

INTRODUCTION:

1. Comfort zone: “a place, situation, or level where someone feels confident and comfortable...the level at which one functions with ease and familiarity” (www.Merriam-Webster.com).
 - A. Most everyone has a comfort zone, and that is not necessarily a bad thing, seeing no one wants to live in constant discomfort.
 - B. God’s people being comforted is important (2 Cor. 1:3-4 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and **God of all comfort**,⁴ who **comforts us** in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which **we ourselves are comforted by God**.”).
2. But when comfort become the guiding force in our lives, even if we are unconscious of it, it will generally deter our progress in life, especially in doing God’s will.
3. So, I believe this subject needs to be addressed. And it needs to be because...
 - A. As I get older, I understand the draw of doing what I am comfortable with, of everything staying the same, of not having to think about new things.
 - i. That kind of comfort is not the way the Lord would have us live out our lives.
 - ii. Being a Christians is not a static lifestyle.
 - B. This pandemic has helped expand our comfort zones beyond the norm, pushing us more than ever to box up our Christianity so that we only have to do what we are *comfortable* with doing.
 - i. Now, I understand how the events and concerns of the past couple of years can affect you, your outlook, and your comfort level.
 - ii. But truthfully, many of our shortcomings in this area were around before 2020.
 - iii. What the past two years did is solidify our comfort zones or caused them to grow even larger, likely making us comfortable with doing even less than before.
4. So, I want to talk about our comfort zones because we need to think about them and analyze them in light of God’s word in order to change them if need be.

BODY:

I. Being in Christ means new life and growth.

- A. Salvation means being **re-created** to a newness of life.
 1. We are *new creations* in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17 – “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” – ESV).
 2. Our conversion results in us being raised to *walk in newness of life* (Rom. 6:4 – “Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in **newness of life**.”).
 3. Our salvation is to ultimately result in real change in our thinking and actions resulting in a changed life.
- B. Christians must **grow in respect of salvation** (1 Pet. 2:1-3 – “Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,² like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that **by it you may grow in respect to salvation**,³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”).
 1. Being a saint involves putting sinful things out of our lives. But that is only part of it.
 2. We are told to desire the pure word that we might, literally, “grow to/into [*eis*] salvation.”
 - a. We are to be people that ingest the word of God that we might be nourished to grow.
 - b. The goal of this growth is spiritual maturity that befits and assures our eternal salvation!
- C. We must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord (2 Pet. 3:17-18 – “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,¹⁸ **but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”).
 1. There is always the danger of falling away. And growth is the answer to avoiding that.
 2. We understand how one grows in knowledge. But how does one grow in grace?

3. When we grow in knowledge of the Lord, His will, and His sacrificial attitudes and actions, **which are the very means grace has come to us**, and put that knowledge into **action**, we are going in God's grace.
 - a. The service that results from this knowledge of grace manifests God's grace in our lives.
 - b. 2 Cor. 8:1-2 – "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the **grace of God** which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, ² that in a **great ordeal of affliction** their **abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.**"
 - i. These brethren were sorely afflicted and in deep poverty. They did not have physically or financially comfortable lives.
 - ii. Yet, **God's grace** led them not to hold up in their comfort zone, but to look beyond themselves and joyfully give to their brethren with liberality.
 - c. As Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give to their needy brethren as they should he again spoke of God's grace as the motivation (2 Cor. 9:8 – "And God is able to **make all grace abound to you**, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, **you may have an abundance for every good deed**").
 - i. Grace, again, is directly connected to our ability to better serve Jesus and our brethren, abundantly suppling us for every good deed.
 - ii. So, the more we serve, the greater the grace.
4. An honest examination of our comfort zone is of great spiritual value because:
 - a. It can hinder our growth in service to God.
 - b. Hindering our service to God also hinders God's work of bestowing and filling our lives with His grace.

II. We must follow Jesus despite our fears!

- A. Jesus' call has always been to "follow" Him.
 1. This is what the call to be a *disciple* is—a call to be a *follower*.
 2. This has been Jesus' call from the beginning.
 - a. Matt. 4:18-22 – "Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And He said to them, "**Follow Me**, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. ²¹ Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and **He called them.** ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and **followed Him.**"
 - b. Matt. 9:9 – "As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, "**Follow Me!**" And he got up and **followed Him.**"
 - c. There are other examples; but the point is clear. Jesus calls us to follow!
- B. Jesus' call to follow is one requiring suffering and sacrifice.
 1. It is a call to suffer as did Jesus (1 Pet. 2:20-21 – "For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. ²¹ For you have been **called for this purpose**, since **Christ also suffered for you**, leaving you an example for you to **follow in His steps**").
 - a. We are called for the **purpose** of following in the steps of a **suffering** Savior!
 - b. I am not sure how much I really grasp this...or even want to grasp this.
 - c. There is little place in the call of Christ for the ease and convenience of personal comfort.
 2. Christ's call is to follow as a *fellow cross-bearer*.
 - a. Matt. 10:37-38 – "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸ And he who does not **take his cross and follow after Me** is not worthy of Me."

- i. To follow Jesus requires taking up our cross, **the very symbol of shame, suffering, and death**, and do so willingly.
- ii. Again, this reality is difficult for us to grasp, especially here in the USA!
- b. Matt. 16:24-25 – “Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, **he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.**”²⁵ For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”).
 - i. This is the second time Jesus has said this!
 - ii. And this time it followed Jesus’ revealing to His disciples that **He must suffer and be crucified** at the hands of the Jewish leaders.
 - iii. Here Jesus adds:
 - 1) The requirement of **denying ourselves**, which would apply to comfort, fear, etc.
 - 2) That if it is our **physical life** we are focused on **saving**, we will lose **eternal life**.
 - iv. I believe this “pandemic” has exposed in far too many a willingness to save their physical life over receiving eternal life from the Lord.
3. Christ calls us to follow Him in great sacrifice.
 - a. Jesus’ call to the rich young ruler (Mk. 10:21-22 – “Looking at him, **Jesus felt a love for him** and said to him, “One thing you lack: **go and sell all you possess and give to the poor**, and you will have treasure in heaven; **and come, follow Me.**”²² But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.”).
 - i. Jesus’ call was one founded upon His love for this young man.
 - ii. Yet, this call required what we see as extreme sacrifice—one that should cause us to consider our view of the “stuff” we have and what it means to us.
 - 1) Think about how unsettling, how uncomfortable, this command really is!
 - 2) We really need to know whether we serve Christ or *stuff*.
 - b. Consider Jesus’ response to those who claimed a desire to follow Him (Lk. 9:57-62 – “As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.”⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”⁵⁹ And He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.”⁶⁰ But He said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.”⁶¹ Another also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.”⁶² But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”).
 - i. Jesus’ call requires a willingness to sacrifice...
 - 1) What we would tend to call “normal” comforts of life—no place to lay our heads.
 - 2) Social norms, fitting in with the ways of world.
 - a) For, some suggest the one who desired to bury his father may have desired to remain with his father until his death, to fulfill his duties as a son.
 - b) Others point out that he may have desired to avoid the Jewish scandal that would have resulted from leaving his father unburied for a certain time.
 - c) Whatever it was, Jesus said that the worldly can do the worldly things.
 - 3) Any reluctance on our part to leave behind our past.
 - ii. There is simply nothing here about our physical “comfort” affecting our service!
- C. Before we get discouraged, we should be reminded that we are called to do nothing less than was required of Jesus.
 1. Jesus was willing to serve despite the sacrifice it required (Phil. 2:3-8 – “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with **humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;**⁴ do not merely look out for your own personal interests, **but also for the interests of others.**⁵ **Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,**⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with

God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a **bond-servant**, and being made in the likeness of men.⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death**, even death on a cross.”).

- a. Our concern for serving others is to follow that which is exemplified in Jesus’ humble incarnation and suffering on our behalf.
- b. How willing am I to truly **empty myself** and **suffer** for the good of others?
2. Jesus served others despite physical exhaustion and inconvenience (Mark 6:30-34 – “The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught.³¹ And He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and **rest a while**.” (For there were many people coming and going, and they **did not even have time to eat**.)³² They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.³³ The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them.³⁴ When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and **He felt compassion** for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and **He began to teach them** many things.”).
- a. When Jesus saw the people, he did not become frustrated or angry that they never considered that he needed rest and food.
- b. Jesus ignored being tired and hungry to seek the good of those who followed Him.
- c. Am I willing to follow Jesus and put aside my needs and be inconvenienced for the good of others?
3. Jesus was willing to open His life to those who needed Him (Matt. 9:9-13 – “As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector’s booth; and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he got up and followed Him.¹⁰ Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?”¹² But when Jesus heard this, He said, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.¹³ But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”).
- a. Jesus chose to associate with the *uncomfortable* crowd—those considered out of the Jewish “comfort zone”—because they needed Him, and He desired to serve them.
- b. These were people whose lives were the opposite of Jesus’!
- c. How willing am I to do the same?
 - i. Our willingness to open our lives and homes to others will be addressed in a future lesson.
 - ii. But for now, consider Jesus’ example and see what applications to make to your life.

III. General application: Acceptable service in Christ requires...

- A. Comparing our lives to Jesus’ life to see how closely we are following (Matt. 10:24-25a – “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master.²⁵ It is enough for the disciple that he **become like his teacher**, and the slave **like his master**...”).
 1. We are called to be like Jesus, our teacher and master!
 2. This requires that we fully understand that we are not above Jesus and what He experienced, that He and His will sit far above us, our lives, and the comfort we might desire.
 3. I need to be able to we honestly say, as did Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is **no longer I who live**, but **Christ lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20).
- B. Refusing to surrender to our fears.
 1. Fear is what make it is easy to create and stay within our comfort zones!
 2. Life becomes so very small, so empty, and miserable when we begin to run from our fears or become imprisoned by them.

3. Fear hampers our lives and limits us from fully experiencing God's love (1 John 4:16-18 – “We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this, love is perfected with us, so that **we may have confidence** in the day of judgment; because **as He is, so also are we in this world.** ¹⁸ **There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear**, because fear involves punishment, and **the one who fears is not perfected in love.**”).

C. Living by faith

1. We are strongly exhorted to live with the confidence of faith (Heb. 10:35-39 – “Therefore, do not throw away your **confidence**, which **has a great reward.** ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. ³⁷ For yet in a **very little while, He who is coming** will come, and will not delay. ³⁸ But My righteous one **shall live by faith**; and **if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.** ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”).
2. Here we are exhorted to:
 - a. Hold strongly to the confidence we have in Christ and do all His will for our lives that we might receive the promised and great reward.
 - b. Remember that Christ's coming is but a short time away even for those who live a “long” life. So, the only reasonable choice is to live by faith.
 - c. Not shrink back, or shy away, from service to Jesus and others due to fear, inconvenience, or personal comfort, seeing that will result in being rejected by God.

CONCLUSION:

1. I encourage you to examine yourselves to determine...
 - A. If you have a firm grasp of what it means to be answer the call of Christ to be a disciple, a *follower* of Him.
 - B. How much, if any, personal comfort, or convenience, a “comfort zone” if you will, is hindering your service and the growth of God's grace in your life.
2. If you are guilty of these things, God offers the answer in Christ—the answer of grace, forgiveness, and hope.
3. What will you do with Jesus today? Will you trust your life to Him and His will that He might give to you eternal life?
 - A. If you do, you will not be disappointed, seeing that confident endurance in service to Christ has great reward.
 - B. Will you come to Christ in F-R-C-BP?